

VZCZCXRO4875
PP RUEHBC RUEHDBU RUEHDE RUEHKUK RUEHLH RUEHPW
DE RUEHROV #0201/01 2631641
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 201641Z SEP 06
FM AMEMBASSY VATICAN
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0490
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RUEHVV/ISLAMIC COLLECTIVE
RUEHROV/AMEMBASSY VATICAN 0518

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 VATICAN 000201

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/WE LARREA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 9/20/2016
TAGS: [PREL](#) [VT](#) [KIRF](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#)
SUBJECT: POPE AGAIN TRIES TO CALM STORM

REF: VATICAN 199

VATICAN 00000201 001.3 OF 002

CLASSIFIED BY: Christopher Sandrolini, Charge d'affaires a.i.,
EXEC, State.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

Summary

¶1. (C) In his weekly audience September 20, Pope Benedict again sought to defuse tensions stemming from his September 12 remarks on Islam at the University of Regensburg. He emphasized that the controversy stemmed from a "misunderstanding" and again disassociated himself from the offending quotation. He went on to note his "profound respect for world religions and for Muslims, who worship the one God and with whom we promote peace, liberty, social justice and moral values for the benefit of all humanity." There is talk among diplomats and inter-religious dialogue activists that the pope might strike the offending quotation from the final version of his Regensburg speech, but this is unlikely. Catholic inter-religious dialogue experts have been critical of the pope, and have received wide play in Vatican-based media. One told us privately he thought the incident would set inter-faith efforts with Muslims back 10-15 years. Others in the Vatican have been much more supportive of the pope and see no need for any further papal apology (septel). Benedict's words September 20 may not wholly calm the storm, but indications are that the Vatican will not go much further.
End Summary.

Weekly Audience

¶2. (U) In his weekly audience September 20, Pope Benedict again sought to defuse tensions stemming from his September 12 remarks on Islam at the University of Regensburg. He said today that in his talk he had included a quotation on the relationship between religion and violence that "unfortunately, lent itself to possible misunderstanding." Benedict stressed: "In no way did I wish to make my own the words of the medieval emperor. I wished to explain that not religion and violence, but religion and reason, go together. I hope that my profound respect for world religions and for Muslims, who 'worship the one God' and with whom we 'promote peace, liberty, social justice and moral values for the benefit of all humanity' is clear. The

quotations within Benedict's speech are drawn from a Vatican document on religious freedom and inter-religious issues.

Another Solution?

¶3. (C) Meanwhile, there was talk among diplomats and inter-religious dialogue activists of the pope striking the offending quotation from the final version of his Regensburg speech. The Vatican had circulated a text with a heading indicating that it was provisional. Contacts here in the inter-religious dialogue and diplomatic communities have told us that this step would go a long way towards soothing Muslim anger on the issue. The Egyptian ambassador to the Holy See, for one, has been pushing this solution. But our Vatican contacts tell us that this is an unlikely scenario. The pope has already apologized and made significant gestures of reconciliation, an official in the Secretariat of State told us. He didn't see the pope changing his text over what he saw as essentially a misunderstanding.

Inter-religious Dialogue Experts Weigh In

¶4. (U) Interested parties continued to weigh in on the issue, most notably Catholic experts on inter-religious dialogue. Most were highly critical of the pontiff. Fr. Daniel Madigan of the Pontifical Gregorian University described Pope Benedict's inclusion of the medieval text in his lecture as "puzzling," and said there had been no need for the pope to use the quote to

VATICAN 00000201 002.3 OF 002

illustrate his lecture. Madigan, who acts as an advisor to the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue, said that in the Regensburg address, Pope Benedict did not engage with Muslims, but with a version of Islam enunciated by a Christian locked in battle with them. He was not surprised that conflict resulted.

¶5. (U) Vatican-based media reported that Georgetown University's John Borelli, a former inter-religious affairs specialist at the U.S. Bishops Conference, said the pope blurred the line "between narration and accusation" in using the quotation. He saw no worth in citing an insult such as those that Christians and Muslims have traded for centuries, even if the pontiff was just using it for effect. However, on a positive note, Borelli said situations like those caused by the pope's remarks were also opportunities to renew efforts to promote dialogue and understanding, "and move forward with greater trust, hope and cooperation."

¶6. (U) Fr. Tom Michel, a former Vatican official now working at the Jesuit headquarters in Rome, lamented the "banishment" of the Vatican's former inter-religious dialogue chief, Archbishop Michael Fitzgerald, to the nunciature in Cairo, and claimed that there was no one in the Vatican bureaucracy "trained in Islamic faith, practice and tradition." Michel said that the fact that the pope did not intend to offend Muslims is beside the point; offense is often caused by ignorance or a lack of sensitivity. He suggested that the pope should apologize for his remarks and

not just regret the reaction they provoked.

¶17. (C) Claudio Betti, a representative of the Community of Sant'Egidio (long active in inter-faith dialogue), told us his Muslim contacts were angry. "This incident will set us back 10-15 years," he speculated. Betti thought much of the Muslim reaction was irrational, and noted that the violent responses tended to lend credence to the very point Muslims resented. He also noted that some Muslim leaders were simply piggy-backing on the responses of others, trying to outdo each other in responding on the issue. But the reality of today's media-driven world and heightened sensitivities, he said, dictated that religious leaders and others had to watch their words carefully.

Comment

¶18. (C) We had surmised - and then heard from Vatican contacts - that the pope's text did not pass through the usual vetting channels at the Vatican. Giving what amounted to an academic speech in his native language at his former university, the pope was (as one Vatican contact told us) in his "comfort zone" -- he didn't see the need to get feedback on the speech. This official suggested that the pope wouldn't have changed his message, but would have lifted the quotation if someone had given him any hint of the outrage it would provoke.

¶19. (C) With his Wednesday address, the pope again disassociated himself from the 14th century quotation and emphasized common ground with Muslims and Islam. This may not wholly calm the storm, but indications from the Vatican are that Pope Benedict will not go any further. While Catholic inter-religious activists such as those quoted above have been critical of the pope, they were not often his biggest backers in any case. More conservative Catholics, including officials within the Vatican, have been more supportive of Benedict in the aftermath of the controversial speech, and would be loath to see a more formal papal apology (septel).

SANDROLINI